
A TRAP TO CATCH A SUNBEAM
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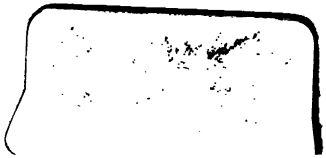
BY THE AUTHOR OF



AMY'S KITCHEN:

A VILLAGE ROMANCE.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "A TRAP TO CATCH A SUNBEAM;"
"OLD JOLLIFFE;" "SIBERT'S WOLD;"
"THE DREAM CHINTZ;"
&c., &c.

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AMY'S KITCHEN.

"DEAR heart alive! what a noise those children are making," said a clean, bright-looking, elderly woman, as she crossed the hall of a large country-house on her way up stairs.

"Yes," said the man she addressed, "Mr. Everard is at high romps with them in the dining-room."

"Well, I hope it won't be too much for Miss Everard."

"Oh no, bless you, mistress likes it," and the man went on with the lunch-tray he was carrying through the baize door into the kitchen, and nurse proceeded up stairs with the burden she conveyed—a baby some eight months old. There was a noise going on in the dining-room, truly. Five children, varying in age from seven to two, were romping with a

gentleman who, notwithstanding his white hair, seemed as much a child in his enjoyment of the fun as any there. He was pretending to be a tiger, and crawling on his hands and knees from under the dining-room table, which was supposed to be his den, after the children, who screamed as loudly as though he was the veritable voracious beast he pretended to be. The noise and fun had been going on for some time, when the door opened and a lady entered, whose presence quieted the tumult for a moment.

"Oh! Aunt Margaret," the children exclaimed, running to her, "we are having such jolly fun: Uncle Dick's a tiger."

"Is he, really?" answered the lady. "I hope he's not very hungry, then, or he may be tempted to eat me."

"No, he's not hungry," said one boy, "for he's just ate Franky."

"Poor little man!" said Aunt Margaret. "What am I to do without my little Franky?"

"I'se here," said the little fellow, running up to her and taking her hand.

"Oh! I'm so glad," she said, stooping down to kiss him. "My dear Richard, how hot you look," she continued, turning to the gentleman, who had flung himself into a chair to

rest; "and, I declare! not one piece of holly or mistletoe hung yet," and she pointed to a large basket, which stood in one corner of the room, filled with holly, mistletoe, and evergreens.

"Oh, please, Aunt Margaret, don't scold us, and we'll begin directly," said the gentleman. "Ring the bell, Fred, and Foreman shall bring us the steps and a ball of string, and to work we'll go. *Please* don't scold."

It seemed quite unnecessary to make such a request, for scolding and Aunt Margaret never could be named together, her low, musical voice, and sweet, I might almost say holy, face could only be associated with all that was gentle and loveable. Her life had been a very sad one; but, like gold tried in the furnace, her sorrows had only rendered her more pure and good, and now, in her declining years, her chief happiness consisted in making others happy. At Christmas time she loved to collect around her her nephews and nieces, her bachelor brother, and any who would come to see her who would not in their own homes rejoice as she felt those should who called themselves Christians. Her sister's child had not married well, and had now a large family about her, for whom she felt it difficult to provide; no Christmas rejoicings would therefore have gladdened their little

hearts, had not kind Aunt Margaret remembered them, and not only invited them to her house, but sent funds for their transit from London. Her brother, from his cheerless, dark chambers, she lured away too, and the only child of her eldest brother, who, having no mother, poor girl, would have passed Christmas with the grave lady under whose care she was placed, but for Aunt Margaret, whose pressing letter of invitation could not be refused; and so she came. Aunt Margaret had not seen her for some time, and greatly was she grieved at the air of listless indifference she assumed—so unnatural in a young girl. She was very handsome, and possessed of a good property; so that, in a worldly sense, she appeared to have everything to make her happy. Her parents died before she could sufficiently love or remember them so as to deplore their loss; and Aunt Margaret could not, therefore, imagine the cause of the melancholy and want of interest she so evidently evinced. While the merry party I have described were busy decorating the room with the holly, and Aunt Margaret watching them, smiling her approval of their efforts, Helen Everard was alone in her own room; she was standing by the window, looking out on the landscape enveloped in its mantle of snow,

and shuddering as she looked and thought how dreary it was. She heard every now and then, as the door opened, the merry shouts of the children below, but she seemed to have no wish to join them; to look out on that cold, dreary scene seemed more consistent with her feelings. A tap at her door at length disturbed her; the permission to come in was followed by the entrance of her aunt.

"My dear child, why are you alone here? They are all so merry and busy down stairs, putting up the Christmas decorations: why do you not help them with your taste?"

"I will, if you like, dearest aunt," said Helen, gently.

"I should like it, dear girl; I think you are too fond of brooding alone: it is not good for young folks to be so much in dream-land. Of what does my Helen think so much?" said her aunt, putting her arm round the young girl's waist, and drawing her towards her.

"Of nothing very pleasant, dear."

"Indeed, my child! Why, at your sunny age nothing but pleasant thoughts should ever come to you. What have you to worry you?"

"I cannot explain to any one, aunt."

"Well, I will not force your confidence; but only just remind you, dear, that God has given

you many great blessings, and that He loves His creatures to be grateful; that He would have the language of their hearts to be—'This is the day that the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it;' the loneliest being on earth has still his hope of heaven, and that should drive away all gloom—all mourning. Sorrows must come in turn to us all, we need not make our own; and at this time of year, especially, all selfish grief should resolutely be put aside, and our best efforts be directed to showing our sense of the great mercy and love which purchased for us a heaven, where all sorrow will be driven away."

Helen made no answer, but her large tears fell on her clasped hands as, in her sweet, slow, measured tones, her aunt thus spoke. And then Aunt Margaret continued more gaily—"Now, my dear one, suppose you oblige me by putting on your bonnet and coming with me into the village. I am going to give some Christmas gifts to some old friends of mine, and I think one old body will cheat you out of a smile even. Will you come?"

"Yes, dear aunt, if you wish it," answered Helen, and, soon equipped, they set forth on their expedition.

"Do you not think, Helen," asked her aunt,

as they walked along, "that these griefs, or fancied griefs, of yours might be dissipated by some active employment?"

"I have often wished for employment, aunt, but I can think of none. What can a young lady do? Teaching in schools, district visiting, working altar-cloths and carpets—such are the *fashionable* occupations of young ladies now-a-days; but none of these are to my taste. I have seen too much and heard too much of the girls who thus employ themselves to wish myself enrolled in their ranks."

"I think it quite possible, my dear child, that you may have seen and known many very silly girls, who, actuated by unworthy motives, have occupied themselves in such matters; but I do not see that that should throw discredit on the employments themselves, nor do I see either that you have no other mode of occupying yourself open to you, there are so many ways of being of *use;* and to feel that we are so, or in the slightest degree making others happy, is the surest way to be happy ourselves; but here we are at my friend, Mrs. Bass's," and as she spoke Aunt Margaret tapped at the door of a neat, pretty cottage, which was quickly opened by a very bright-looking old woman, with an expression of content and happiness in her face

seldom seen save in a child, so that, notwithstanding her white hair, it was difficult to believe that she was an old woman.

"Walk in, ma'am, pray do, and you, young woman, please; and wishing you a merry Christmas, which I do most heartily," said the old dame, curtseying at every word, for in no want of respect did she call Helen "young woman;" it was one among Mrs. Bass's many peculiarities that she called all young persons, gentle or simple, "young woman" or "young man."

"I wish you a merry Christmas, Mrs. Bass, too," answered Aunt Margaret, kindly shaking hands with her; "it is nice invigorating weather, is it not?—quite fit for Christmas."

"That it is, ma'am, sure; but what's the meaning of that word, ma'am?"

Aunt Margaret smiled as she answered, "'Invigorating?' that means giving strength and vigour."

"Ah, yes, I see, ma'am; thank'ee, ma'am; fine thing it is to have larning, young woman, aint it?" she said, turning to Helen; "and you see, I aint got none, so I allays asks when I hear any of them dixonary words what they means."

Helen was so unaccustomed to visit amongst the poor that she knew not in the least how to

talk to them, so she murmured some reply, and then Aunt Margaret began to ask the old lady after some of her relatives, while Helen sat wondering how her aunt could find such a visit interesting, and thinking how good and amiable she was.

"I have brought you a Christmas-box, Mrs. Bass, if you'll accept it," at length Aunt Margaret said, taking from a black bag she had carried a small parcel.

"Oh! dear, ma'am, how very kind you are, to be sure. Deary me, this is a beautiful handkercher!" she exclaimed, as she opened the parcel and spread over her knees the handkerchief it contained. "This reminds me, ma'am, that I was in at Mr. Spriggett's t'other night to buy my Mary a handkercher, and the young man that served me give me two. Oh, dear, ma'am, I was in a way when I got home, I couldn't hardly sleep, for, thinks I, may be the head will find it out, and that poor young man will lose his place. I felt so for him, you see, young woman, because I've got a boy of my own," she continued, turning to Helen, to include her in the conversation, that she might not feel neglected. "So the first thing in the morning, I started off and waited about the shop-door till I caught sight of the same young man,

and then I gave it quite sly into his own hands, for fear, as I told him, there should be words about it."

"Well, that was very kind and considerate of you, Mrs. Bass, I'm sure, and I should think would be fully appreciated by the young man," answered Aunt Margaret.

"Yes ma'am; but what's the meaning of that word?"

"Valued—taken for what it's worth," replied Miss Everard.

"Oh, ah! I see, thank you, ma'am; larning is such a fine thing; how beautiful it was, ma'am, to hear that young man t'other night at the school-house, when he gave his—what was it, ma'am?"

"Lecture, do you mean?"

"Yes, ma'am, lecture. Oh, it was fine to hear his dixonary words; how I should have liked to ask the meaning on 'em: what was it about, ma'am?"

"Geology, I think."

"Ah, I see. What's the meaning of that word, ma'am? that's one I wanted to know."

"Why, it is the science that teaches about the earth, and the stones and the things of which it is composed."

"Oh, ah! I see, thank'ee, ma'am. Deal o'

larning you've got, sure!" and poor old Mrs. Bass gazed with wondering admiration in Aunt Margaret's sweet face, who with difficulty suppressed her laughter, not only at Mrs. Bass's peculiarities, but at the expression of Helen's face, and she then rose to go, bidding Mrs. Bass good-bye, and again shaking her hand cordially, which the good old soul, seemingly in an ecstasy of admiration, pressed to her lips.

"Well, Helen, has not that visit amused you?" asked her aunt, when the door had closed on them.

"I was astonished at the strange old body, aunt, and more so at your patience in talking to her; I should have given her the handkerchief and come away instantly."

"My dear child, my sitting and talking to her gave her more pleasure than the present, and to me she affords so much amusement and satisfaction, that I often go and see her for refreshment; her cheerful, happy face, her innocent desire for information, and excessive kindliness, shown in every action of her life, make her one of my prime favorites. I have a few more less interesting old folks to leave some Christmas gifts with, and I will not inflict all of them on you, but I should like you to see one more person, for I think you cannot fail to be

pleased there, so if you will walk briskly on I will join you; her house is at the end of the village."

Helen walked on, therefore, alone, thinking and wondering too, as she walked, how it was that her aunt, whose life, she knew, had been so sad a one, could look and seem so cheerful; how she could thus unselfishly interest herself in the concerns of others. Helen could understand doing so as a duty, but not as a pleasure. It seemed to her a most irksome task to go from one cottage to another, amongst a set of poor, ignorant beings, from whom she thought neither instruction nor amusement could be derived; and certainly that would not be an occupation she should select to cheer and rouse her. She was thinking so deeply that she did not even perceive her aunt had joined her till her soft voice roused her by asking—

"What intense subject of thought occupies you now, dear Helen?"

"The old one, aunt. I did not know I was so deep in it, though, which I must have been not to hear your step behind me. I believe envy of you occupied my thoughts partly—envy of your bright, contented spirit—you, who have had so much sorrow, to be so cheerful, does astonish me."

"I am chiefly indebted to constant, useful occupation for this happy frame of mind, Helen. I have never permitted myself to be idle, but always endeavoured to be occupied in some way which should benefit some one, and I am sure it is one of the best receipts for securing a cheerful and contented spirit. I am going to take you now to see another proof of what I say, in the person of a young woman whose cup of sorrow has indeed been full. One day you must hear her history, and you will then be more astonished at her than you are at me. Here is her cottage."

They stopped before a large, old-fashioned, half-timbered cottage, with porch, and lattice windows, and neatly kept garden, and Miss Everard's gentle tap at the door was answered by the fattest, rosiest, cleanest of little girls, whom Miss Everard stooped down at once to kiss, so irresistible to all lovers of children was the little, fat, dimpled face held up to hers.

"Is Amy Sedley at home, dear?" she asked.

The little one nodded assent, and Miss Everard, followed by Helen, walked into a large Kitchen, where a sight worthy an artist's pencil awaited them. The Kitchen itself was very picturesque, with its wide chimney and the blazing log which burnt upon the hearth, re-

flected again and again in the bright tins which hung against the walls; its massive beams, black with age, and wide staircase, with twisted banisters, leading to the upper rooms; the oaken furniture, of grotesque shapes, and the cabinet, through the glass doors of which peeped some rare old china. All this in itself reminded the gazer of an old Dutch painting, and greatly, therefore, was the effect heightened by the living group. Some twenty children, none over ten years of age, were busily employed twining into long wreaths holly, mistletoe, and evergreens. A woman was sitting in the midst of them, in one of the old-fashioned settles, with two babies in her lap, evidently twins; a deep scar on her cheek and throat marred a once beautiful face, but the expression of tenderness and love with which she was watching the children restored much of the lost beauty. By the side of her chair a crutch was placed, telling the sad tale that she was crippled also. She made an effort to rise as Helen and her aunt entered, from which Miss Everard at once begged her to desist.

"Pray, Amy, do not disturb yourself and your babies; I am only come to bring you the book I promised, and to wish you a merry, at *least* a happy, Christmas."

"Thank you kindly, Miss Everard; I wish you the same. Please be seated; I will put my babies on the floor, and then I can look at my book."

"They won't come to me, I suppose?" asked Miss Everard.

"No ma'am, I think not; they are new comers, and very shy," she answered, as she tenderly placed the little creatures on the ground at her feet, and reaching from the shelf near her a couple of toys, gave them one each to play with, and then with evident delight examined the book Miss Everard had brought her; it was an edition, handsomely bound, of 'The Imitation of Christ.'

"Everything comes in time to those who can wait," she said, looking up with a bright smile; "I have so long wanted this book."

"I am delighted to be the one to gratify your wish, I'm sure," answered Miss Everard. "These are not all your little ones, are they?"

"No, ma'am, I have several fresh hands to-day come to help make wreaths for the church. Mr. Ladbrooke has been here ever so long, showing them how to do them; all those bigger girls and boys are school-children. I don't know if I could manage so large a flock; but my little party are in very good order, I think,

bless their little hearts; they are next to no trouble, considering, too, what babies they are: my oldest is only six."

"They do you great credit, Amy, I am sure. I suppose they are looking forward to their feast to-morrow."

"Yes, ma'am, I think they are. As soon as the church-wreaths are finished, we shall decorate the Kitchen. I want it to look very gay, for several ladies are coming to see the children have their dinner. Shall you come, ma'am?"

"I do not think I shall be able, Amy, I've such a party of little folks at home to see to."

"I have taught them a little Christmas hymn to sing; would you like to hear them, ma'am?"

"Very much indeed, I should."

Amy took up a whistle which hung round her neck, and blew it sharply. Instantly all the children stopped their employment, and ranged themselves in a row; and then Amy said, in a gentle, tender voice, as though every child there was precious to her, "Sing the Christmas Hymn, my darlings;" and with eyes bent down upon the ground, and little hands clasped, the children sung the hymn she had taught them; not loudly and shrilly, but so softly and reverently, that few could have lis-

tened unmoved to the innocent voices singing of the "Glad tidings of great joy."

Miss Everard expressed her pleasure very warmly to Amy, and even Helen said how much gratified she had been, and how well Amy had taught the little things, so they left her with a face flushed with pleasure at their praise.

Christmas morning dawned—bright, clear, and frosty—and a large party from Miss Everard's started for church, causing great amusement to the villagers, and, I fear it must be owned, some distraction during service. Greatly to her aunt's astonishment, Helen, after church, requested permission to go and see the children dine at Amy Sedley's, and as she was pleased to see her expressing interest in anything, she gladly consented. On her return she said it really had been a pretty sight, and that she would own Amy Sedley was an interesting person. She had asked her if she might come and see her again, and Amy said she should be delighted to see her.

"I want to hear her history, aunt; do you know it?" she asked.

"Yes, love, but it is best to hear it from her own lips; and she will tell it you as she told me."

The rest of the day Aunt Margaret noticed that Helen certainly seemed brighter and more interested than usual in what was going forward, and entered with great spirit into the fun which, with Uncle Dick for the instigator, became rather fast and furious after dinner; especially when Foreman the man-servant, entered, bearing parcels directed to every one in the room—toys, books, jewellery—presents, in short, suitable to the ages of all the recipients. Who the mysterious sender was no one could guess. Uncle Dick declared it was Father Christmas, but little Franky crept up to him, and putting his rosy mouth close to his ear, whispered—"I think it was 'oo."

Aunt Margaret was quite of Franky's opinion, so she rose from her seat and kissed him for her present—an example readily followed by all; so that poor Uncle Dick's reward seemed to be total suffocation. He was, however, spared this sad termination to his existence by the opportune arrival of Foreman with the snap-dragon, which amusement lasted till nurse entered to carry the little folks off to bed; and though most unwilling to accompany her—as was natural—she had a hard matter to keep them awake whilst she undressed them, so thoroughly tired out were they with their

romps with kind Uncle Dick. And then, peace and quiet restored by the absence of the merry ringing voices, the rest of the party drew their chairs round the fire and talked more rationally, if less merrily, and Helen, who seemed unable to forget Amy Sedley, asked her aunt what she did with all those little children?—if she kept a school?

"No, love, it cannot be called a school exactly, it is more a nursery; they are children of women who go out to work, or who have no mothers, or whose sickly health requires constant care and attention. She thoroughly understands and loves children, and manages them beautifully. Mr. Ladbrooke, our vicar, and many of the gentry, have wished to enlarge it—make a complete institution of it, as it were, and place her at the head—but Amy has begged them not in her time, but to let her go on as she has begun, only calling it 'Amy's Kitchen.' She says she wishes the children who live to grow up to remember her and her large Kitchen, with its comfortable, home-like aspect, unassociated with any idea of school. Love is Amy's ruling principle—she governs by it entirely; and most assuredly she makes it answer, for the cleanest, neatest, best-

behaved children in the parish are those brought up in 'Amy's kitchen.'"

"Do they pay for admittance?" asked Helen.

"Oh, yes, but quite a trifle; she has a little income of her own, and several ladies place children with her, and they give a yearly sum, so she is enabled to keep it up, or, at the small rate she charges, she never could pay herself."

"I must not forget my annual present to her," said Uncle Dick. "Mind, Margery, you jog my memory."

"I will, Dick, for I am so glad to have her encouraged in her good work."

"And how is my friend, Miss Jolly?" he asked. "Is she still living?"

"Oh, yes, poor old soul; and will be most flattered by a visit from you. I saw her the other day, and told her you were coming, and she begged that she might have the 'pleasure of an interview.'"

"Oh, I'll go and see her, by all means; tomorrow, before I start, perhaps I shall have time. And now, Nelly, let's have a little music; may we, auntie?"

"Oh, certainly, if Helen is musically disposed."

"Yes, aunt, I always like to sing if any one chooses to listen; at home they never do."

"Well, we do, love."

Uncle Dick flew after his niece with all the activity of a man half his age, opened the piano, arranged her chair, found her music, and stood by her while she sang, humming with her and keeping time with his foot—an accompaniment Helen could have dispensed with but his evident pleasure made up for this small annoyance, and she sang again and again, till dear, kind Aunt Margaret came, and, kissing her tenderly, thanked her and led her away, for she said she was sure she was tired.

"It has been a great, great treat to me, darling; it has carried me back to my young days, when your sweet mother was your age, and sang like you."

"Dear aunt," said Helen, "I wish I lived with you always. I seem some comfort and use to you; I am none to any one at home."

"My dear child, is that your grief?" asked her aunt, looking searchingly at her. "Come and sit here now, and tell me," and she placed her on the footstool at her feet. "Uncle Dick is entertaining your cousin with riddles and puzzles, I see, and you and I can chat undis-

turbed. And so you think you are no use, and that makes you unhappy?"

"Yes, aunt, I cannot think what I live for; no one understands me, and no one cares for me."

"Ah! that 'no one understands me' is such a cry with—may I say it?—many foolish girls," said Aunt Margaret, smiling. "Try to get over that feeling, dear; it is wiser indeed, for thinking so encourages the idea.

"Many homes are made unhappy by want of mutual confidence and mutual forbearance, and as a rule, dear Helen, I have found the fault arises with the one who has thought herself 'misunderstood;' she instantly wraps herself up, as it were, in her own injured feelings, and her family, wondering at her coldness and strangeness, either grow angry with her or cease to notice her: is it not this you find at home?"

"Yes, aunt; but I cannot think it is my fault; I have often asked papa if I should sing to him, and his only answer has been 'Don't worry me;' and then, when I have given up singing altogether, he has reproached me with wasting my talents. Mrs. Evans agrees with papa in whatever he says; I have no sister or mother to talk with or comfort me; and, in short, I cannot see what I live for."

"My dear child, that is not for us to ask; we are here and we must endeavour to make the best use of our time while we are here; and though our mission may not be very apparent to us, we must console ourselves with the recollection that 'those also serve who only stand and wait.'"

Helen sighed, she had no answer to make, she only knew that her life seemed to her dull and objectless, that worldly pleasures and gaieties had but little charm for her, and the fact that she possessed wealth only made her suspicious that kindness and attention were shown her on that account.

Aunt Margaret, thinking she had said enough to her for the time, contented herself with saying softly, "Remember one thing, Helen, this feeling is *not* humility," and then rising, she joined Uncle Dick and her other niece, who were busy over some puzzles, and Helen remained sitting gazing at the fire. The next morning, soon after breakfast, Uncle Dick, said he should go and see his old friend Miss Jolly, but he wanted a companion.

"I will go, uncle, if you like," said Helen; "I want to go to Amy Sedley's."

"By all means come along, then."

"But you wish to stay a little with Amy,

Helen, and that will cause you to lose your train, Richard, so you had better take one of the children for a companion; Helen will just as soon go alone, will you not?" asked Aunt Margaret.

"Certainly; I do not in the least mind walking alone, and I should like to stay some time with Amy."

"Very well, then, settled, Franky shall be my companion and take care of me," said Uncle Dick, and they were soon all equipped and starting along on the hard, crisp ground at a good pace, little Frank immensely proud of the honour Uncle Dick had done him.

Amy received Helen with a smile of welcome; the elder children were seated in a circle on the ground, with a box of large letters, which they were playing with, and learning at the same time; three or four younger ones, seated in another circle, were playing with some bricks; and the babies were asleep in two cradles, which Amy rocked with her foot while she busied herself with some work she was cutting out and fixing for the employment of the elder children in the afternoon. Amy was singing when Helen entered, and the children quietly playing and listening to her; it seemed, to her, wonderful management to keep so many children *quiet* and happy, and she said so.

"I am sometimes astonished, miss, myself at them. When they are naughty or troublesome I tell them it worries 'poor Amy,' and it seems always to have the effect of quieting them; of course I keep them constantly amused and interested—that is most needful to keep them good. I've a great store of songs, which they love to listen to, and stories also; children are very compassionate, and the impression that I am delicate and helpless, I think has a great effect on them. In the prayer they say night and morning, I have taught them to pray for 'poor Amy,' and there seems a magic in the words. I tell them my own story sometimes, and that interests them very much."

"I am sure it must," answered Helen; "I should like to be one of the children to hear it too."

"I will tell it you with pleasure, miss; I like to tell people how good God has been to me, for I hope I may then be the humble instrument to lead others to place their entire trust in Him. The little ones in a few moments will go out to play, and then I will tell you, if you have time to wait."

"I have plenty of time, and should like it so much," answered Helen, so in a few moments, the room cleared from children, with

the exception of the two asleep in the cots, Helen was listening to Amy's story.

There was something inexpressibly touching in the tone of Amy's voice, and as, with clasped hands, and eyes bent down, in plain and simple language, she told her history, more than once even Helen's eyes were filled with tears.

She told of her childhood, of the father, who, addicted to drinking, would come home and ill use her gentle mother, and of her own terror of him; of the horrors of his death-bed, when he lay raving, so that the awful silence of death was a relief; and her mother's anguish to find herself left penniless, with three young children to support; how she, a little thing of seven years old, had nursed and tended to the two younger ones, and striven to help her poor mother; and how the clergyman had come forward to assist them, and had paid for her schooling; and how God had mercifully taken to Himself the little ones, for they were so sickly they could never have supported themselves; "and then," she continued, "mother and I got on tolerably for some years, till I was old enough for service, and had, by our good clergyman's recommendation, got a good place, when my mother was seized with a

low fever, which ended in depriving her of the use of her limbs. I would not leave her, and nothing remained for me but to try and get a living by needlework, and support her. It was a poor living enough; but I was cheered on by one whom I loved very dearly, and who loved me dearly too. He was a farmer's son in the neighbourhood, and I was to be his wife as soon as he could keep one. We were very happy together. All his Sunday evenings he used to spend with us by dear mother's bedside; so that even on those days, which seemed so drear and dark to look forward to, I look back now with a sorrow which cannot be told; I have never been so happy since."

"There was a woman in the village, of the name of Layton, who, poor thing, was afflicted with such a temper that no one would go near her; she was often ill, but no one would nurse her; so, when I could be spared from mother, I used to go in and out to her, and take her now and then some light pudding or a little broth, which I had had sent for mother, and which she could not eat, till at last she seemed to love me, and never spoke crossly or roughly to me, but would listen when I read to her from the Bible, and beg me to come again and read the same chapter to her over and over again, so soothing it seemed to her to hear of

the mercy which endures and forgives. I have said what a comfort I found in the visits of him whom I one day thought to marry. You will imagine what I felt, then, when one day I heard he had left the village—that he was gone, without a word or notice, to sea. We had parted quite happily on the Sunday, and on Thursday he was gone. His mother was distracted; she could not tell me why, he was gone; but he had come in one evening, looking very sad, and going out in the morning, had never come back again. He had left in his room a little note, saying that he was gone for a sailor, and he did not care if the deep sea buried him and his cares together, he had no interest left in anything. What his cares were no one knew. It seemed a hard, cheerless life then, working for my daily bread; but my poor mother tried to comfort me, and Mrs. Layton was kinder than ever: many a day, when I went in to see to her, she would draw me towards her and kiss me, and tell me I was her only comfort—this helped me to bear my great sorrow. A few months after this my poor dear mother's sufferings ended in her death, and then I *did* feel alone in the world; but even then I was consoled by the thought of her happiness—her release from pain and misery. A night or two after the funeral, I

was sitting up late to finish some work, when the awful cry of 'Fire!' startled me. I ran down stairs and opened the front door, and soon saw bright flames shooting up into the sky, and learnt from the people who hurried past that it was a tavern on fire, and it had caught Mrs. Layton's cottage. I knew she was ill in bed, I had been sitting with her and reading to her only an hour or two before. In a moment I was in the street. I don't know what impelled me, but I seem only to remember that I was soon rushing up a staircase, through a blinding smoke, with the sound in my ears of people calling me to stop. I ran into her room; she was sitting up in bed, looking half wild with terror. I took a blanket from the bed, rolled her in it, and raised her in my arms. I can only recollect that I carried her some distance and fell; nothing more is distinct to me, but a sense of scorching pain; but when I came to my senses, many weeks after, I heard that she, poor thing, was dead, and that I was scarred as you see, and a cripple for life; but no longer dependent on my own exertions for support, for Mrs. Layton had left me what property she possessed, having no relative, and feeling she owed me some reparation for a great wrong she had done me,

and for my effort to save her life. A sealed paper was then given me—she had left it directed to me. This is it," she said, taking from her bosom a paper, and handing it to Helen; "I always keep it about me."

Helen read it: "Child, I have wronged you cruelly. I drove James Bird to sea. I told him you were deceiving him; for I thought if he married you, the only friend I had would be gone. I cannot undo the harm I have done, but I leave all I possess to you, and may God and you forgive me."

As soon as Helen had finished reading it, Amy continued—

"No tidings had been heard of him since he left; but soon after Mrs. Layton's death, his mother and father, who had taken every pains to trace him, and had succeeded in finding out the name of his ship, heard that it was wrecked and all hands lost; so he died, believing that one who would have died for him had wronged and deceived him. Miss Everard, it was hard to bear," and, for the first time, Amy raised her large blue eyes to Helen's face.

Helen could only answer—"It was, it was." What were her foolish troubles to sorrow like this?

"I lived on," she continued, "and because

my life was spared, I felt God had work for me to do. What was it? I had no one left to nurse or care for, I could never be wife or mother—such hopes were buried in the deep sea; but I loved children so dearly, to take a little thing and nestle it in my arms seemed to soothe me more than anything. And then I thought, could I serve little children—could I help to bring them to Him who loved them? I used to stand at my cottage door and watch them playing in the road, hear little innocent lips uttering words that made one shudder, and I saw little, helpless, sickly babies dragged about in cold and damp by children scarcely older than themselves, and then I thought I would try and take charge of them—have a sort of nursery for them. I soon got two or three mothers to let their children come, and you cannot tell what a comfort they were to me; soon there were so many who wanted me to take them, that I found I must get a bigger house. This old place was to be let; it had been standing empty a long time, and so the landlord said he would lower the rent if I would take it. I came here with four little ones, and I have now twelve; only four sleep here—two have no mother, and two worse

than none," added Amy, in a low voice. "That is all I have to tell you, miss."

"And you have certain tidings that that ship *did* go down with all hands, and that none were saved?" asked Helen. "You have never heard anything but that?"

"Never, miss; many have been my trials, but hardest of all I have found it that he should have died without knowing he had wronged me. "Perhaps he does know now," she said, and smiled a sweet, sad smile; "and when my work is done, and I go home to rest, I may see him once again—that is my hope and my faith."

"And you can always bear the worry of so many children, and play with and amuse them with all this weight of sorrow on you?" asked Helen.

"Oh, yes, miss; they never are a worry to me. I am so interested in them, and the constant employment they give me keeps me from thinking, and from vain and fruitless sorrow."

"You are a great wonder, Amy, "answered Helen. "May I come and talk to you often whilst I am here."

"That you may, miss; I am so pleased to see any lady who will kindly come and talk

to me; but now I must get my little ones' dinners."

"May I just stay and see them sit down?"

"Certainly," said Amy; and with a new and strange interest Helen watched Amy lay the cloth and prepare the dinner, assisted by the oldest little girl. Broth with rice in it and potatoes beautifully boiled formed their meal, and when all was ready the whistle summoned them; they came in two and two, and took their places and, with folded hands and bowed heads, waited whilst Amy said grace before they attempted to begin their dinners, even the youngest there; and then Helen took her leave, humbled by the sight of such contentment and resignation, and the faith which could see the mercy that sent her trials to purify and strengthen her, and lead her to look for happiness in a better and brighter land.

Uncle Dick and his little companion had just reached home before her, and when she opened the dining-room she heard peals of laughter. Uncle Dick was recounting his adventures.

"Come in, Helen dear, and have some lunch," said Miss Everard; "Uncle Dick has commenced, for fear he should lose his train;

he is amusing us with his account of Miss Jolly."

"I'll be bound, Helen," he said, as she took her seat at the table, "that your visit has not been as amusing as mine. Fancy Miss Jolly telling me that, though much better, she was still 'powerful weak;' something inside went cluck, cluck, cluck, just like tin."

"My dear uncle, what did she mean?" asked Helen, as again the peals of childish laughter rang through the room.

"That is more than I can tell you; but it was in answer to an inquiry respecting her health, so I suppose they were some peculiar symptoms of physical discomfort, which I should say would puzzle the whole College of Surgeons."

"Tell some more, Uncle Dick, it's such jolly fun," said one of the boys; "tell Helen about the rest of it."

"Well, Helen, she asked me, suddenly, whether I believed in 'antipoads?' Not having the slightest idea what she meant, of course I said 'No.' 'No more do I,' said dear Miss Jolly, vehemently, 'and nothing shall make me believe that people t'other end of the world walk with their heads downwards.'"

"Uncle Dick," said Helen, laughing, "I

believe you make it up as you go; they are stories of your own invention."

"Ask Aunt Margaret, if it is not true; she knows Miss Jolly well enough."

"I can well believe it, Helen, certainly," said Aunt Margaret; "Miss Jolly has often told me that the medicine the doctor sent her was not strong enough; that she only felt it as far as her elbows, and she liked to feel it at the end of her fingers. I assure you she is quite a character. She always wears her bonnet. I have seen her sitting up in bed in it, and I really believe she sleeps in it. I will take you to see her, if you like."

"I should very much like to see such an oddity. I think your village deals in them."

"I certainly think the principal part of the population is crazy," said Uncle Dick, "I must say. After listening to Miss Jolly's eccentricities, a woman, who was sitting with her when I went in, turned to me, and said she was herself a great sufferer, for she had so much 'information.' I bowed to express my sympathy and conceal my smiles at the same time, for I had not the least idea what she meant."

"Inflammation, of course," said Miss Eve-

rard, smiling; "it is a very common pronunciation here."

"Oh, indeed; well, I certainly think a dictionary is needed for this village. You should have one to supply all your visitors with."

"Uncle Dick is like your friend, Mrs. Bass, aunt—always wanting to know the 'meaning of that word.'"

"I think he is; but indeed, Uncle Dick, you must spend no more time in amusing these little folks, for here comes the carriage round, and it is a long journey to the station."

"Oh! I'm so sorry Uncle Dick's going," said all the little voices.

"But, you see, if I don't go, how are you to have the twelfth-cake from London I've promised you, I must go to order that," and so, with this consolation, Uncle Dick departed, the carriage watched as long as it could be seen by the group of little heads at the window, poor Franky waving his handkerchief long after the last trace of the carriage had departed.

"Well, now, Helen, tell me about Amy," said Aunt Margaret; "have you heard her story?"

"I have, indeed; it is a sad tale, poor thing; and she is so patient and contented."

"She is, and useful too; it is a great and

good work she is doing so steadily and unostentatiously. One child has just got a place in a nursery with a friend of mine, and she tells me she is amazed at the good behaviour and handiness of the child, who is only twelve years old. She had been with Amy two years; she was older than those she generally has, but she suddenly lost both her parents, and Amy took her at once, without any charge. I remonstrated with her, telling her it was not justice to herself to be burdened in that way; but she answered in that strange, simple manner which is so peculiar to her—'The barrel of meal will not waste, nor the cruise of oil fail, I seem to have no fear.'"

"How long is it since her lover went away," asked Helen.

"Nearly five years, I think; his parents left the village soon after they heard of the loss of his ship, and that was another trial to Amy, for it was a pleasure and comfort to her to go in and perform any kind office for the old people."

"It seems to me that her life has been one scene of trial and disappointment, and yet she says she tells her history that people may see how good God has been to her."

"Because, with the true faith of a Christian,

she counts each of her trials mercies. She believes thoroughly in the love which chastens; moreover, the sparing of her life for her present work, and the success she has in it, she rightly considers a mercy, for surely it is, dear, a great honour to be permitted to work in our Master's service."

"I must go often to see her again, dear aunt; I think she has done me good."

"I am so glad; I hoped she would. I think all imaginary griefs must sink into insignificance when compared with her real sorrows; but do not think for a moment that I have no sympathy with you, for that feeling of wretchedness without any ostensible cause, of which you complain, is very painful. I can imagine it would be almost a relief to have a real sorrow. As I have somewhere read—'There is this good in real evils: they deliver us while they last from the petty despotism of all that were imaginary.'"

"Aunt," said Helen, suddenly, "I do not think it is fair to give you half confidence—you who are so good to me. I have a trouble which is not quite imaginary."

"Indeed, dear child! What is it?"

"A friend of papa's persecutes me with his love, and I don't know what to do."

"How do you mean? Do you not return his love?" asked her aunt.

"No; and yet it seems so sweet to be loved by any one, that I cannot make up my mind to reject him altogether. Since I have been here he has written me such a letter, begging me at once, and decidedly, to let him know his fate, and if it be a refusal it will kill him. Do you think it really will, dear aunt?" and Helen looked up innocently at her aunt.

Aunt Margaret smiled, as she answered—

"I have no such fears, dear Helen. 'Men have died, and worms have eaten them, but not for love.' And," she continued, more seriously, "do not let anything or anybody persuade you to marry without love. There is a fatal reasoning sometimes urged that love will come AFTER marriage. It *may;* but it is an awful risk to run."

"I can scarcely tell whether I love him or not. When I think of dismissing him, never seeing him more, and so driving from me the only being who has really ever seemed to care for me, I feel I cannot; and yet to marry him, to be his for ever, is equally painful to think of; for there are so many things about him I don't like, so much in him I would see altered. He is not my ideal."

"Few people marry their ideals, Helen. But just simply take the beautiful words of the marriage-service, and ponder them; take them in their fullest sense, and see if you can—'obey him;' that is, do anything he wishes you, however much you may dislike to do it, willingly and cheerfully, because you love him so that you are sure his wishing it makes it right. 'Serve him;' that is, anticipate his every wish, gratify his every whim, and work for him, if need be, because you love him so that to serve him is your highest pleasure. 'Love and honour him, in sickness and in health;' that is, if illness should come on him, and he grow fretful and exacting, you can patiently and lovingly minister to him, because you love him; so that it is happier to sit by his sick bed than to join in the gayest society that can be offered to you; and that, should that sickness last, and so leave him a poor invalid, constantly requiring your care and attention, you will gladly, joyfully 'forsaking all others, keep you only unto him,' because you love him so that to watch by him, to cheer and soothe him, is the only happiness you have on earth. If you can do all this, you may, with a clear conscience, stand before God's altar, and take him for your wedded husband."

"Oh! dear Aunt Margaret," said Helen, awed and astonished at her aunt's earnestness; "you do indeed think gravely of marriage."

"And so would I have you think, my child. Our Church has done her best to preserve us from unequal and ill-assorted marriages; and if we would only follow her teaching, such things could not be. Girls begin by considering marriage the end and aim of their existence, never thinking that an equally useful existence may be passed as a single woman; and that though fewer blessings may attend her, she has far less miseries than those which beset a wretched wife. Sweet indeed are the ties of wife and mother, when God's blessing rests on them; but it cannot and will not rest upon a broken vow."

There was a moment's pause, and then Helen said—

"Dear aunt, I will write this day and refuse him; for I know I could not do all you have said; and you will love me a little, will you not?"

"Indeed, I will and do, dearest, and more than that, I will write and ask your father to spare you to me for some months, that I may cure you of this unnatural melancholy, which I think I can; and, moreover, you will then

be in no danger of an encounter with your heartbroken swain."

"Thank you, dearest aunt, that will indeed be delightful. And now will you let me walk with one of the children into Hurstleigh? I suppose there are good shops there; for I want to get some toys for Amy's children."

"Oh yes, you shall go, certainly; but you must be quick, or it will be dark before you are home. I am sure both Amy and the children will be very grateful."

"I suppose there is a carrier who would bring the toys out; they will be too many for us to carry."

"Yes, he will bring them in by the middle of the day, to-morrow."

"Then I shall have them sent at once to Amy's; she will be so astonished." And away Helen started to prepare for her walk, with a feeling of greater happiness and elasticity than she had ever known since she was a child, and so had the magic of giving pleasure to others begun to work.

And the winter days slipped by, and Twelfth-night had come and gone, Uncle Dick's cake having been duly discussed, and the merry little ones had all gone home, leaving Aunt Margaret and Helen alone, for Mr. Everard

had consented to her staying; and daily Helen had visited Amy, and daily her interest seemed growing in the scheme; the box of toys had been received with the greatest delight, and it was such a new and pleasant sensation to Helen to see the bright smiles the children gave her, and to learn from Amy that she was known amongst the little ones as the "good lady"—only, too, for the gift of a few toys, which had cost her so little. Surely, love was purchased cheaper than she thought. She had asked Amy if she could manage any more children, for she had seen one wretched little cripple in the village, whom she thought needed care, and she would pay for her if Amy would take her. Amy consented at once; and Helen insisted on paying so large a sum that Amy was enabled to have what she had so long needed—a young servant to assist her.

One day, after Helen had been about two months with her aunt, she came down to breakfast and smilingly presented her with an open letter. Aunt Margaret read it, and giving it back to her, said—

"I thought so, dear Helen. I am very glad, for your sake, that the poor young man's death does not lie at your door. I suppose he will not send you wedding-cards."

"Hardly, when scarce two months are over since his passionate avowal of love and assurance that my refusal would kill him. Oh these men, aunt! I wonder if there are any worth having."

"Oh yes, love, many fine specimens of their sex exist, one of whom will, I hope, in due course of time come and claim my Helen for his wife. Although, perhaps, not very complimentary to you, I must say I think this young man has shown his sense by marrying instead of dying. Where he showed his folly was by saying he should die. Many a silly girl has been frightened into marriage by such assertions."

"But do you believe, aunt, that men can really love?"

"Indeed I do; and more truly and faithfully than women—the natural loneliness and dependence of a woman's nature makes her cling to any one who will love her, if her first affection is misplaced or unreturned—but men, love once and for ever."

"Aunt Margaret, with this specimen of constancy before us, can you assert this?"

"I can; for I believe he either did not love you, or he does not love his wife. If we could search into the hidden secrets of a man's heart, you would find there but one love. They may,

and do, *make* love a score of times; but that which is the very 'life-breath of their hearts' they feel but once."

"Then when are we to be sure that we have secured this love, aunt?"

"That we seldom can be *sure* of; but you *may* be sure that a good man will only marry a woman whom he esteems enough to cherish and protect; and if you love him, you must content yourself with this, and not inquire too curiously into what has gone before."

"Then do you not think the marriage-vow as binding on a man as a woman?"

"Distinctly I do; and were I offering advice to a man, I would say to him exactly what I said to you the other day; but I wish as much as possible to make you see life as it is; to understand that men are quite differently constituted to women, and must not be judged by their feelings; they act from their heads, not their hearts, and it is providentially ordered that they should. If a man is disappointed in his first affection, he suffers silently and intensely, but afterwards, feeling it is not good for man to be alone, he marries—soothed and comforted by the love of the woman he has chosen, and willing to keep her in sickness and in health, out of gratitude for her love and

her companionship; and if she keeps his house well, and is admired and liked by his friends, he is happy and satisfied; and the old love is buried deep in his heart of hearts, never to disturb him again with its forgotten music."

"Aunt, I will wait till I find the one true love, then, before I marry."

"I trust you may find it, dear; for, like most rare things, it is worth having; and when you do find it, Helen, do not trifle with it. And now I think we have talked romance long enough, and we must begin to take a practical view of things, ordering dinner to commence with;" and rising from the table, Aunt Margaret, with her little basket of keys, went to superintend her household affairs, leaving Helen deep in thought on all she had said; but her aunt soon called her from her meditation, for to keep Helen actively and usefully employed was part of her system for driving away the spirit of melancholy and discontent which had possessed her. Mrs. Evans, under whose care she had been since her mother's death, had contented herself with superintending her studies with her masters, and on her "coming out" chaperoning her to parties; but as to qualifying her for her duties in life—teaching her that something more than mere

existence was required of her—that she had never done. Already, under her wise aunt's guidance, was she rapidly improving; and her bright merry laugh was music to Aunt Margaret's ear, as she, with a large apron on, under the tutelage of the good old cook, was learning to make jellies and soups for the sick and aged. Aunt Margaret did not press her to visit the poor; for she knew that all people are not constituted alike, and that to be able to talk to and be interested in the affairs of those who are placed in a different sphere is a peculiar characteristic; but Helen was very kind-hearted, and sympathised sincerely with suffering and sorrow, and was glad, so glad, to be useful, that she asked her aunt to let her try to make something at home for them—and her delight was like a child's at a new toy when she first succeeded in turning out a mould of jelly. But her happy life was drawing rapidly to a close; her father had written for her return, and it now became Aunt Margaret's task to show her that her duty was to make her father's home happy, and that her efforts must be directed to doing so. But still poor Helen's heart sank within her when she contrasted the bright, useful, happy life she had been leading with the gloomy, unin-

teresting one she must lead at home. But a few days remained of her visit, when one morning Foreman announced that Mrs. Bass wanted to speak to Miss Everard.

"Show her into the library, and I will come," said Aunt Margaret.

When she entered she found Mrs. Bass surveying the books, and her first exclamation was—

"Dear, dear, what a sight of larning there is here, to be sure!"

"There is, indeed, Mrs. Bass, and we ought to be very grateful to such learned men who have given us such a fund of information."

"Yes, marm, sure; I've troubled you this morning because I've no larning myself, and though I allays means well, still I don't like, you see, doing anything without asking them as has larning."

"I'm sure I'll help you willingly, if I can."

"I know that, marm; you're allays willing to help any one, and, above all, poor Amy."

"Certainly I do feel a very warm interest in her. What can I do for her?"

"Why, you see, marm," said Mrs. Bass, drawing close to Miss Everard, and speaking very confidentially, "I was in Hurstleigh on a little matter of business yesterday, and there came into a shop a man I was pretty certain I

knew, yet for the life of me could I think of his name. He was inquiring if there was any way he could get over here, for he was too tired to walk. It was many years since he had been in the neighbourhood, and he'd missed his way. Well, marm, I stared at him well, and the more I stared the more I felt sure I knew him, but I couldn't mind his name; but I couldn't forget him, I thought of him all the way home and after I got home, and in the middle of the night it all came to me—it was James Bird, if ever I see him."

"Indeed!" said Aunt Margaret, now thoroughly interested, "are you sure?"

"Sure, marm. It was him or his ghost. Now you see this was yesterday evening, after the carrier mail come out, and so there was no conveyance unless he could have got a fly from the White Hart, and nothing of a fly come in the village, I know; and I do feel so worried like what to do, whether to tell poor Amy or not, so I thought I'd come and ask you, marm."

"I certainly would not tell her, Mrs. Bass, without some little preparation. Such sudden news would overwhelm her."

"Over—what's the meaning of that word, marm?"

"Why, be too much for her—crush her."

"Ah, yes, I see, marm. I thought you'd know best what had better be done."

"I will go down at once to her, Mrs. Bass, and see if she has the slightest idea that he might possibly have been saved from the wreck, and you keep watch near her door, and prevent, if it should be him, his sudden entrance. Come in yourself first, and give us warning. Hurry on as quick as you can, like a good soul, for Amy is so delicate that a sudden shock might kill her."

In a quarter of an hour's time Aunt Margaret was in Amy's cottage, and good Mrs. Bass was standing at some little distance outside.

With a tact and delicacy which few possessed as much as Aunt Margaret, she led to the subject of the wreck, and questioned Amy closely as to her belief that all hands were lost.

"It was said so, ma'am," she answered quietly.

"Yes, but still there have been instances in which some few have been saved and come ashore on spars, and landed on desert islands, coming home at last, when their friends had long thought them dead."

Amy raised a quick, startled glance to Miss

Everard's face, as she answered in a low, earnest voice—

"Oh! Miss Everard, I have never suffered such a hope to live in my mind one moment. I have thought of what the Scripture says, and would not let my 'heart grow sick,' for I should be but a poor help to these little ones then. No, with that great ship went down all my hopes of happiness on this earth, and I have only humbly prayed since to find them at last in heaven."

As she spoke the last words Miss Everard's cheek grew pale and her heart beat quickly, for there were steps on the gravel path leading to the house, and she could hear Mrs. Bass's voice in earnest conversation; then the latch of the door was gently raised, and Mrs. Bass looked in and went through a variety of peculiar signs which left no doubt in Miss Everard's mind that, however strange it might be, James Bird had actually arrived. Amy's back was to the door, but whether Miss Everard's conversation had prepared her, or the long-loved, though long silent, footsteps were not forgotten, certain she rose from her chair, and turned to the open door, and never was that shriek, the pent-up agony of years, as it were, escaping, in that moment of joy too great to bear, for-

at last. Now, Helen, if you were going to stay a little longer, we might find out if that is the true love you say you will wait for."

"Aunt Margaret match-making!" answered Helen, laughing; but she was too much interested in what she had to tell to pursue the subject, and eagerly began to relate what had passed, and to ask her aunt if she knew any one who could take charge of the children.

Miss Everard thought she did know a very suitable young girl, whose health prevented her from going to service, but one who she thought could manage the children. And so it was agreed that the next morning they should go and see her; but in the evening Mrs. Bass was again announced, wishing to speak to Miss Helen. She had seen Amy, and heard Helen's plan, and so had come to offer herself for the situation.

"You see, young woman, it wants no larning, and so it seems as though it was just the thing I could manage. I'm dearly fond of children, and willing to go on just the same as Amy tells me, which, maybe, some o'they upstart gals wouldn't; and these winter evenings its terrible lonesome for a poor widder woman. So, young woman, if you thought I was fitting, I should be so pleased to undertake it."

Helen said she must consult with her aunt, and would let Mrs. Bass know, but she thought herself it would do very well; but she could not decide hastily. So, with many smiles and curtseys, the old dame departed, and Helen and her aunt talked the matter over, and finally decided in her favour, so that Mrs. Bass was duly installed mistress of "Amy's Kitchen." And preparations went rapidly on for the wedding, the farm was purchased, and Helen begged to be allowed to present Amy with her wedding-dress. The night before the marriage-day, James brought her an ebony crutch, mounted in silver.

"It's a sad present, dearest," he said; "but as you must have it, I thought you should have something more worthy to support you than that common wooden thing."

The wedding was very quiet, but very pretty. The children attended, and James gave them a dinner afterwards at the farm. After dinner, Amy kissed each of them, bade them be good children for "poor Amy's" sake, and said she would often come and see them; and then Mrs. Bass carried them off, and James and Amy were alone in their new home—happier, Amy said, than they should have been had they married in the heyday of their youth,

before separation had tested their love; it might be so: at any rate, no one could doubt their happiness now.

Helen had had an extension of leave from home, to witness the wedding, and Aunt Margaret said she must ask a few friends to dinner, and would take the advantage of Helen's being with her to help entertain them. Among the guests was Mr. Edward Erskine, the new possessor of Lindon Hall. Oh, gentle Aunt Margaret, had you no meaning beyond mere courtesy in inviting him? Why have those sweet grey eyes of yours an unusual twinkle of mischief in them as Mr. Erskine stands by Helen while she sings, and seems drinking in every note of her splendid voice?

Aunt Margaret has won another heart, for Mr. Erskine's horse may be seen led up and down before her house for hours, while he is talking to her, and she is listening and advising in those soft, spring days, when Helen Everard is trying to carry out her good resolution, and make her father's home happy, though her heart wanders back again and again to her aunt's home, which she had learnt to love so well, and about which there lingers some nameless charm, which she can scarcely herself account for or would like to acknowledge; but when, after

some months of duty well fulfilled, she pays her aunt another long visit, and some one, standing before her, and looking down into the depths of her dark-blue eyes, tells her "You are the *first* and *only* woman I have ever loved," she can give the charm a name, and acknowledge to Aunt Margaret that, since a certain dinner-party one face and one voice had ever haunted her.

"There, now, my Helen, you are, I trust, quite happy. You will, I am thankful to say, be near your poor old aunt——"

"And be able, dearest auntie," said Helen, interrupting and kissing her, "constantly to visit with you that school where you first taught me the object of living, made me ashamed of my own weakness and folly, and gave me such a noble example to follow, that never to my dying day can I forget "Amy's Kitchen."

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